



LIVING STANDARDS AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM AMONG LESS FORTUNATE URBAN HOUSEHOLDS: EVIDENCE FROM TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Food security necessitates not only the provision of sufficient food to meet the market demand, but also should create a condition for healthy life. Food security, an important input for improved nutrition outcome, is concerned with physical and economic access to food of sufficient quality and quantity in a socially and culturally acceptable manner. The study throws light on to analyze living conditions of the selected households in urban areas; to examine pattern of consumption expenditure across consumption classes and to analyze the extent of utilization of PDS by rural and urban households. Seventy five households were selected by adopting purposive sampling technique and data were collected from primary source during the period November to December 2014 at Ukkadam in Coimbatore City and was analysed using percentage and chi-square analysis. The findings of the study highlight the need for a strategic and comprehensive policy suited to specific needs of the population to solve the problems of food insecurity in the economy.

KEY WORDS: Expenditure, Living Conditions, Public Distribution System, Food Security, & Poor Households,

Introduction

India has achieved self-sufficiency in food production and also enhanced its capacity to cope with inter-year fluctuations in production. Even after these achievements at the national level, the problem of household food insecurity is yet to be solved. The food grain self-sufficiency that is visible in India is often argued to be due to lack of purchasing power among large masses of rural population (Sen, 1983). The problem of transitory food insecurity is associated with issues related to either access or availability of food whereas food insecurity is associated primarily with poverty and arises due to continuously inadequate diet (Radhakrishana, R, 2002). Food security necessitates not only the provision of sufficient food to meet the market demand, but also should create a condition for healthy life. A family (or country) may be food secure, yet have many individuals who are nutritionally insecure. Food security is therefore a necessary but not a sufficient condition for nutrition security (World Bank, 2003)

Objectives

- To analyze living conditions of the selected households in urban areas.
- To analyze the extent of utilization of PDS by rural and urban households.

Hypothesis

- Poor and non-poor differentials were evident in living condition of the selected sample group.
- Utilization of PDS by the households was quite low.

Earlier Studies

Ranjan Ray (2005) examined the changes in the nature and quantity of food consumption in India during the reforms decade of the 1990s, and analyses their implications for calorie intake and under-nourishment. The study documents the decline in cereal consumption, especially in the urban areas, and provides evidence that suggests an increase in the prevalence of under-nourishment over the period, 1987/88 to 2001/2002. The results also point to a significant number of households, even in the top expenditure declines, suffering from under-nourishment. This calls for a reassessment of the current strategy of directing the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) exclusively at households below the poverty line (BPL). The study shows that, both as a source of subsidized calories and as a poverty

reducing instrument, the PDS was of much greater importance to the female-headed households than it was to the rest of the population. Another important result was that, notwithstanding the sharp decline in their expenditure share during the 1990s, rice and wheat continue to provide the dominant share of calories, especially for the rural poor. The Indian experience was in sharp contrast to that in Vietnam which witnessed a large increase in calorie intake and, consequently, a decrease in the prevalence of undernourishment in the late 1990s. The Vietnamese diet displayed increased diversification during the 1990s with a greater role for protein rich animal products and a more balanced diet of nutrients than in India.

Despina Sdrali (2012) analyzed food expenditure patterns in a prefecture of Greece with special emphasis on some selected characteristics that determine the living conditions of the Greek household. A door-to-door questionnaire survey was conducted to collect primary data for this study. The questionnaire gathered information on food expenditure, income and major socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. age, education level, household size, region of residence, number of earners, occupation etc) of 316 randomly selected married households. Regression models were used to estimate the impact of the above characteristics on the demand for food (food at home and food away from home). Income appeared to be the most important variable explaining the demand for food among Greek consumer units. Other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education level, household size, presence of children, and region of residence were also significant in explaining the demand for food.

Methodology

The universe of the study consisted of all households residing in Washerman Colony and Kovarthana colony in Ukkadam. From this universe, 75 households were selected by adopting purposive sampling technique as not all the households were willing to cooperate with the investigator and due to time constraints. Data were collected from primary sources by administering a pre-tested interview schedule to the selected households during the period November to December 2014. Data collected was analysed by using percentage and chi-square analysis. For the purpose of comparisons, the households have been classified into two groups, namely: Households with monthly percapita expenditure less than Rs.2534.32 are referred to as poor households (PHHS), and Households with monthly percapita expenditure more than Rs. 2534.32 is referred to as non-poor households (NPHHS).

Results and Discussion

Living Environment

The living environment is assessed in terms of ownership of the house, size of the house, type of house, the availability of electricity and latrine, fuel used for cooking, availability of safe drinking water, availability of bathrooms and type of drainage.

More than one-half of the NPHHs were living in houses with three or more rooms while this proportion was only 39 percent for PHHs. Thus, living space was quite cramped for PHHs. Majority (89 percent) of the poor households had to depend on public tap for meeting their water requirements; this figure was 51 percent for NPHHs. All the sample households in the poor and non-poor group had electricity connection. All the households despite their economic status were using LPG. About 11 percent of the PHHs had access to safe drinking water; this percentage was 47 percent for NPHHs. Twenty two percent of the poor and 61 percent of the non-poor households had access to indoor toilet facilities, while the remaining 78 percent of the poor and 39 percent of the non-poor had no access to indoor toilet facilities and had to depend on public toilets. About 72 percent of the poor and 91 percent of the non-poor households had stated the availability of sufficient space for cooking. About 67 percent of the poor and 74 percent of the non-poor households had stated the availability of separate space for washing area. 28 percent of the poor and 42 percent of the non-poor households had closed type of drainage facility, and the remaining percentage had stated open type of drainage. It represents that lack of facility and poor sanitation. It affects the health condition of the selected households. Overall, it can be inferred that the poor households lived in congested places devoid of basic necessities for a healthy life.

Chi-square analysis

Chi-square test was conducted to examine whether there was any differences between poor and non-poor households on various indicators of living environment. The hypothesis framed was:

H₀: Poor and non-poor households do not differ with regard to various indicators of living conditions.

H_a: Poor and non-poor households did differ with regard to various indicators of living conditions.

The estimated results are shown in table 1. The result presented in the table pertains to only those variables which showed significant results.

TABLE 1
Chi-Square Values and Significance Level for Selected Indicators of Living Conditions

S. No.	Variables	Chi-Square Value	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level	Inference
1	Nature of roof	5.031	1	0.025	Reject H ₀
2	Number of rooms	8.217	3	0.042	Reject H ₀
3	Source of drinking water	8.236	1	0.004	Reject H ₀
4	Availability of water	7.583	1	0.006	Reject H ₀
5	Toilet facilities	8.414	1	0.004	Reject H ₀
6	Separate Cooking area	4.276	1	0.039	Reject H ₀

Source: Estimation based on field survey, 2014.

From the estimated results it is evident that there was significant difference between poor and non-poor households in terms of dwelling (which includes nature of roof and number of rooms), source of water and availability of water, toilet facilities and separate area for cooking. Non-poor households were better placed with regard to nature of roof, number of rooms, access to water, and source of water, toilet facilities

and separate area for cooking. In short, non-poor households had a slight edge over poor households with regard to housing conditions.

ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

The Public Distribution System (PDS) tries to ensure the supply of food grains to the poor at subsidized prices. In Tamil Nadu, the government has ensured the supply of essential commodities at subsidized rates to the poor households so as to ensure the food security. Table 2 gives details of the accessibility and utilization of PDS by the selected poor and non-poor households.

TABLE 2
Accessibility and Utilization of PDS by Households (in percentage)

S.No.	Particulars	PHHs	NPHHs	All
1	Accessibility to PDS			
	Yes	94.4	87.7	89.3
	No	5.6	12.3	10.7
2	Utilization of PDS			
	Rice boiled	58.8	54.0	55.2
	Raw rice	76.5	62.0	65.7
	Wheat	88.2	96.0	94.0
	Tur dhal	88.2	78.0	80.6
	Sugar	94.1	98.0	97.0
	Kerosene	64.7	54.0	56.7
	Palmoelin	100.0	88.0	91.0
	Red gram	35.3	12.0	17.9
	Black gram	35.3	36.0	35.8
	Green gram	29.4	16.0	19.4
	Rava	23.5	28.0	26.9

Source: Based on field survey, 2014.

The table also reveals the poor-non-poor differentials in the consumption of essential items. The proportion of households buying rice, raw rice, tur dhal, kerosene, palm oil, red gram and green gram were more in PHHs than in NPHHs. In contrast the percentage of consumers buying wheat, sugar and rava was more in NPHHs. Thus, the extent of utilization of PDS was high among poor households. Their low income may have motivated these households to effectively utilise PDS. Thus PDS ensured food security for poor households in urban areas.

Conclusion

To be concluded that the capacity of the poor household to purchase food can be ensured in two ways. One can either raise the level of income of the poor through employment generation programs (or) through the supply of essential commodities to the poor household at subsidized prices. The Public Distribution System (PDS) tries to ensure the supply of food grains to the poor at subsidized prices. In Tamil Nadu, the government has ensured the supply of essential commodities at subsidized rates to the poor households so as to ensure the food security. The extent of utilization of PDS was high among poor households. Their low income may have motivated these households to effectively utilize PDS.

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